(C) Gems & Jewellery is a thrust area of our exports and accordingly, the Government has taken a number of steps to boost exports from this sector. The steps include fine tuning of Export-Import policies ensuring easy availability of raw-materials at internationally competitive prices, lowering of interest rates on post-shipment credit, allowing authorised dealers to receive import documents credit, allowing authorised dealers to receive import documents upto US$ 25000 by value or its equivalent direct from the overseas seller subject to fulfilment of certain requirements, encouraging exporters to participate in international exhibitions, reducing the minimum value addition for plain gold jewellery from 15% to 10% and also providing necessary assistance including grants to the Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council for expansion of required infrastructure in this sector.

Manufacture of small cars by Tatas

*126. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Tatas have submitted any proposal for manufacturing small cars;

(b) if so, the details of the project, indicating the salient features of the small car; and

(c) how far it is likely to be within the reach of the common man?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Difficulties of mine exploring companies

*127. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) Whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news item which appeared in the Pioneer dated 26th December, 1996 under the caption 'Mine exploration firms hit by State apathy';

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the remedial steps taken by Government to solve the difficulties of the companies who have become frustrated even in getting the most fundamental data like topographic maps?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) Yes, Sir. The news item appeared in the PIONEER dated December 24th 1996.

(b) The news item *inter-alia* refers to the difficulties faced by the foreign companies in getting fundamental data such as topographic maps, non processing of the applications for prospecting licences by the State Governments in accordance with the provisions of law, lack of cooperation on the part of State Mining Directorates for obtaining numerous approvals required for exploration activities, State Governments not providing data package for exploration, absence of perception of financial risks involved in discovery of minerals, etc.

(c) The grant of mineral concessions in governed by the provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Regulation & Development) Act, 1957 [MM (R&D) Act, 1957] and the rules made thereunder. The applications for grant of mineral concessions are recived and processed by the State Governments. The approval of the Central Govt. is required only in case of minerals convered under Schedule I to the MM (R&D) Act, 1957.

The Central Govt. has taken a series of steps under the National Mineral Policy, 1993 including legislative amendments for facilitating private sector invesment including foreign equity participation in the mineral sector. The Central Govt. has also issued guidelines for grant of large areas for prospecting. Further, the Central Govt. has allowed automatic route for foreign equity participation upto 50% in case of mining of iron ore, manganese ore, etc. besides certain non-metallic minerals. Higher equity participation can be allowed on case to case basis subject to the provisions of law. The difficulties pointed out in the news item are mainly covered in the agenda items taken up for discussion during the Conference of State Ministers/Secretaries of Mines and Geology held on 26th and 27th December, 1996 under the aegis of Ministry of Mines. A Committee under the Chairmanship

of Secretary (Mines), Govt. of India with some State Secretaries of Mines and Geology, Secretary General, Federation of Indian Mineral Industries etc. has also been constituted to review *inter-alia,* the existing procedures pertaining to grant of mineral concessions and to suggest measures to reduce delays in this regard at different levels etc. The Govt. has also been interacting with the investors in the mining sector with a view to identify their difficulties and solve them through detailed interaction with the State Governments.

While geological data about mineral deposits investigated by Geological Survey of India (GSI) is available for sale at GSI sale counters, geological and topographical maps can be made available only after due approvals by the Central Government authorities depending upon the nature of such maps.

Private sector in coal and lignite mining

*128. SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA:
SHRI N. GIRI PRASAD:

Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to allow private sector in coal and lignite mining without any price and distribution control of Government; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for taking a decision to end Government's monopoly over the coal and lignite mining in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIMATI KANTI SINGH): (a) The Government have, subject to legislative changes, decided to offer new coal blocks, without the restriction on coal mining for captive consumption only, to the Indian Companies on the basis of competitive bidding. The successful bidder will be free to sell coal in the open market and will be allowed to charge any price negotiated between him and the consumers.

(b) The basic objectives of the above mentioned decision of the Government are:-

(i) to cover the ever increasing gap between demand any supply of coal,

(ii) to augment investments in coal mining which are presently dependent on Government investiment alone; and

(iii) to improve overall efficiency of the industry through competition.

Representation to Review the Penal Provision of the ESIC ACT

*129 SHRI JAGIR SINGH DARD:
DR. SHRIKANT RAMCHANDRA JICHKAR:

Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received representations to review the penal provision of the Employees State Insurance Corporation Act;

(b) if so, the response of Government; and

(c) by when such reforms will be actually made?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) to (c) Suggestions have been received from time to time for making penal provisions in the ESI Act, 1948 more stringent. Review of penal provisions and amendment of the Act is an on going process. Accordingly, comprehensive amendments were made in 1989 and penal provisions provided in sections 84,85 and 85-A were made more stringent. The existing penal provisions are considered adequate for tackling default under the ESI Act. However, these provisions will be further reviewed as and when considered necessary.

Princes of Sugar under PDS

*130 SHRI JALALUDIN ANSARI:
SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI:

Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the issue price of sugar under PDS has been increased by Rs. 1.45 a Kg.;

(b) if so, the details and reasons thereof;

(c) whether Government intend to review its decision; and